

Phoenix Tops 63 Cities as the Nation's Most Disability Friendly City

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The city of Phoenix has won national recognition as the most accessible friendly city for people with disabilities in the National Organization on Disability's third annual Accessible America Contest. The recognition includes a cash award of \$25,000 to be used to further efforts to close the participation gaps for people with disabilities.

Phoenix was recognized for its focus on disability issues and the successful design of programs, services and facilities that are accessible to residents and visitors who have disabilities. More than 17 percent of the city's 1.3 million residents are disabled.

"I'm proud that Phoenix has been honored for the many innovative and creative ways it involves people with disabilities in the city and community," said Phoenix Vice Mayor Peggy Bilsten. "From the Mayor's Commission on Disability Issues that raises disability awareness to the Daring Adventures program and Ability Counts Awards luncheon, Phoenix is a model community that creates partnerships with its disabled residents to ensure an independent and supportive lifestyle."

Numerous city programs support the needs of the disabled including the Head Start program where 13 percent of the children have disabilities, Clear Path Job Training program that provides internships for 90 disabled youth in city departments, the library's special needs center with its barrier-free access and Phoenix Channel 11, which provides real-time captioning of all televised City Council meetings.

The integration of people with disabilities in the community through the employment, recreation and government sectors, has made Phoenix a city where people with disabilities are able to succeed.

Phoenix residents with disabilities work with the city to ensure that the disability perspective is valued through the creation of accessible infrastructure, 100 percent accessible public transit and affordable barrier free housing. Phoenix has a welcoming attitude toward people with disabilities and accommodates them in the work place.

The 10 finalists along with Phoenix were Alexandria, Va.; Austin, Texas; Bloomington, Ind.; Cambridge, Mass.; Chicago; Columbia, Mo.; Fountain Valley, Calif.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Los Angeles; and Miami Beach, Fla. The Accessible America Contest is sponsored by a grant from UPS.

For more information or to become involved with the Mayor's Commission on Disability Issues, or city or local programs, call 602-262-7486/voice or 602-534-1557/TTY.

The following are examples of outstanding city programs that were highlighted in the city's entry:

- Daring Adventures - an accessible, integrated, year-round outdoor recreation program that offers sled ice hockey, kayaking, hiking and camping, hand cycling and cross-country skiing to teens and adults with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.
- Clear Path Job Training program - currently serves 90 interns with significant disabilities. The interns work in various city departments, mentored by city professionals. It has a permanent job placement rate of 70 percent.
- Head Start - Kids with disabilities make up 13 percent of Head Start's enrollment. The city's Head Start disability specialist provides training to caseworkers, program assistants and Head Start parents so they can advocate on behalf of the children. Accommodation efforts for children with special medical needs increased and has served as a national model.
- ABIL - Phoenix provides Community Development Block Grant funding to Arizona Bridge to Independent Living, Arizona's largest independent living center, for their Home Modification Program. They help to integrate residents with disabilities into the community. (examples are available.)
- Special Needs Center at Burton Barr Central Library - offers a nationally acclaimed Special Needs Center that is designed to make access barrier free. The Computer Workplace for patrons with disabilities has a wide range of assistive technology. A large collection of Large Type, sign language and print/Braille and audio formats of disability-related information are available.
- Mayor's Commission on Disability Issues - Commission members have volunteered more than 1,000 hours working with city officials, architects and engineers to remove attitudinal and physical barriers. The Employment and Community Relations Committee coordinates an annual Ability Counts luncheon that awards scholarships to outstanding students with diverse abilities, and recognizes people with disabilities and employers who have made life better for people with disabilities. The "Save Our Space" outreach program educates the community and promotes enforcement of accessible parking spaces.
- The Public Information Office Phoenix 11 close-captions city-produced videos for city departments and provides real-time captioning of all televised City Council meetings.
- For the past eight years, assisted listening devices and open captioning have been available at City Council events.
- The City Clerk's office works with Bethany Ranch, a group home serving people with disabilities, to attach the "I Voted Early" stickers to the voting instructions mailed to all early voters.

- The Parks and Recreation Department - Ten city swimming pools offer adaptive and therapeutic programs to residents. Phoenix has miles of accessible park trails, mountain park trails and interpretive trails.

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